Volume 6, Issue 1, 062502 (1-8)

Fuzzy Optimization and Modeling Journal (FOMJ)

https://doi.org/10.57647/j.fomj.2025.16560

A fuzzy logic-based framework for multi-objective controller placement in software defined networks

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Original Research

Received:
15 December 2024
Revised:
30 January 2025
Accepted:
17 March 2025
Published online:
23 April 2025

Abstract:

Software Defined Networking (SDN) has been hailed as a revolutionary development in network management, with the potential to transform the landscape of the industry. The core principle behind SDN is the decoupling of the control plane from the data plane, a move that has been widely regarded as a significant step towards more centralized control. Nevertheless, determining the optimal placement of controllers, known as the Controller Placement Problem (CPP), remains a significant challenge due to conflicting objectives such as latency, resilience, and load balancing. This paper proposes a novel approach leveraging fuzzy logic to address the CPP. Distinct from heuristic or optimization algorithms, this approach employs fuzzy set theory to manage imprecise and dynamic network parameters while optimising multiple objectives, including latency, inter-controller communication, and load balancing. The proposed method provides a flexible, adaptable framework for CPP across varying network topologies. Experimental results validate the effectiveness of this approach in achieving balanced trade-offs among objectives, ensuring efficient and scalable SDN management, with a 18.7% reduction in maximum node-to-controller latency and a 22% improvement in load imbalance compared to state-of-the-art methods.

Keywords: Fuzzy logic;Software-Defined Network (SDN); Fuzzy set theory; Controller placement problem multi-objective optimization

1. Introduction

The advent of Software Defined Networking (SDN) has precipitated a substantial metamorphosis in the domain of networking. SDN involves the decoupling of the control plane from the data plane, thereby facilitating centralised and programmable network management [1]. This paradigm shift has the effect of simplifying resource allocation and policy enforcement, allowing for dynamic adaptation to changing network demands [2].

In traditional SDN architectures, a single controller oversees the entirety of the network. While this approach is found to be effective for smaller deployments, it is acknowledged that this approach faces scalability and performance bottlenecks in large-scale networks due to increased latency and reduced fault tolerance [3, 4]. To address these challenges, distributed controller architectures have been proposed, where multiple controllers collaborate to manage the network. However, determining the optimal number and placement of these controllers, a problem known as the Controller Placement Problem (CPP), remains a critical research area [5].

Despite extensive efforts to solve CPP using heuristic and optimization algorithms, such as NSGA-II, existing approaches often suffer from computational complexity and limited adaptability to real-time network changes [6]. Furthermore, many methods inadequately balance conflicting objectives, such as minimizing latency, ensuring resilience, and achieving load balancing.

The aim of this paper is to address these gaps by introducing a fuzzy logic-based framework for CPP. The proposed approach employs fuzzy set theory to model imprecise and dynamic network parameters, thereby ensuring a flexible solution. The proposed framework is capable of optimizing multiple objectives concurrently, including the reduction of latency, the distribution of load, and the enhancement of resilience, thereby ensuring the efficient and scalable management of SDN. Experimental results demonstrate the effectiveness of the proposed approach in achieving balanced trade-offs across diverse network topologies.

Conventional methods for solving CPP frequently employ heuristic or optimization algorithms, such as NSGA-II, to address the multi-objective nature of the problem [7, 8].

While these methods are demonstrably effective, they are also characterised by the requirement of extensive computation and a reduced adaptability to real-time network changes [8]. The present paper introduces a fuzzy logic-based approach, utilizing fuzzy set theory to model and optimize key objectives under uncertainty. The proposed method is designed to achieve an optimal balance across conflicting metrics while accommodating dynamic network conditions. The structure of the paper is as follows. The subsequent section presents related works. The proposed approach and some definitions about objective functions are presented in section 3. The subsequent section 4 provides a detailed exposition of the utilisation of simulations in the research. The final section is dedicated to conclusion.

2. Related works

The Controller Placement Problem (CPP) in Software Defined Networking (SDN) has been the subject of extensive research, with various methodologies being employed to optimize performance metrics such as latency, resilience, and load balancing. Existing research can be broadly categorized into the following three approaches: heuristic-based, metaheuristic-based, and soft computing approaches. This section reviews these methods and positions the proposed fuzzy logic-based approach within the existing landscape.

Heuristic-Based Approaches: Early research on CPP primarily focused on heuristic-based methods aimed at minimizing propagation latency between controllers and switches. One of the seminal contributions in this area was made by Heller et al. [9], who proposed metrics to optimise controller placement by minimising node-to-controller communication delays. However, while these approaches have been shown to be effective for small-scale networks, they are not without their drawbacks. Heuristic methods are not well-suited to large-scale networks due to their inability to scale and their failure to take inter-controller communication and load balancing into account [10].

Metaheuristic-Based Approaches: In order to overcome the limitations of heuristics, researchers have explored metaheuristic algorithms such as NSGA-II [11], Genetic Algorithms (GA) [12], and Particle Swarm Optimization (PSO) [13]. These methods efficiently explore large solution spaces and optimize multiple objectives, such as minimizing latencies while ensuring fault tolerance. Jalili et al. [14] proposed a modified NSGA-II algorithm for CPP that outperformed traditional heuristics in achieving better trade-offs among latency, load balancing, and resilience. However, these approaches often require substantial computational resources and encounter difficulties with real-time adaptation due to their reliance on precomputed optimization models [15].

Soft Computing and Fuzzy Logic-Based Approaches: Recent attention has been given to soft computing techniques, particularly fuzzy logic, as viable alternatives to traditional CPP solutions. The incorporation of fuzzy logic within these frameworks provides a mechanism for handling uncertainty and imprecise network parameters, thereby ensuring a high degree of adaptability to real-time changes within SDN environments.

Sohail and Khanum [13] proposed a fuzzy logic-based CPP approach that dynamically adjusted controller placement based on real-time traffic conditions. Despite the study's merits, it was found to lack a thorough evaluation of scalability and multi-objective trade-offs. Hybrid techniques, such as the fuzzy-PSO model introduced by Wu et al. [12], have been shown to outperform standalone fuzzy systems by integrating evolutionary search capabilities. Despite these efforts, the practical application of fuzzy logic in CPP remains underexplored, particularly concerning its ability to integrate multiple objectives such as latency reduction, load balancing, and resilience enhancement [16].

Positioning of the Proposed Approach: This study contributes to the field of soft computing by introducing a "fuzzy logic-based framework for CPP", which optimises multiple conflicting objectives while maintaining adaptability in dynamic network environments. In contradistinction to traditional metaheuristic methods, the proposed framework does not rely on exhaustive search but instead leverages fuzzy inference to dynamically adjust controller placement. A comparison with existing fuzzy-based solutions reveals that the proposed approach offers an integrated, multi-objective optimization model that balances latency, inter-controller communication, and load distribution in a more efficient manner.

The experimental results demonstrate that the proposed method outperforms NSGA-II and POCO in key performance metrics while requiring significantly lower computational resources. The utilisation of fuzzy set theory ensures enhanced scalability, flexibility, and real-time adaptability, thereby addressing the limitations of previous research.

In summary, while previous works have explored heuristic, metaheuristic, and fuzzy logic-based CPP solutions, this paper introduces a novel multi-objective fuzzy logic framework that achieves superior performance across various SDN topologies. The subsequent sections provide a detailed exposition of the methodology and experimental validation of this approach.

3. Proposed approach

The proposed approach utilises fuzzy logic to optimise controller placement in SDN, addressing the complexities of conflicting objectives. The integration of fuzzy set theory and predefined objective functions provides a flexible and computationally efficient solution [15]. The subsequent section delineates the methodology in meticulous detail, encompassing step-by-step elucidations, code structures, and a lucid workflow diagram.

3.1 Fuzzy logic framework

The fuzzy logic-based framework under consideration comprises multiple interconnected components designed to model and optimize the CPP [17]. The basic architecture of the proposed fuzzy logic framework is depicted in figure 1. The following components and steps form the core of the framework:

- **Input Parameters**:
  - Maximum Node-to-Controller Latency (Latency_NC): Represents the maximum delay between a switch and

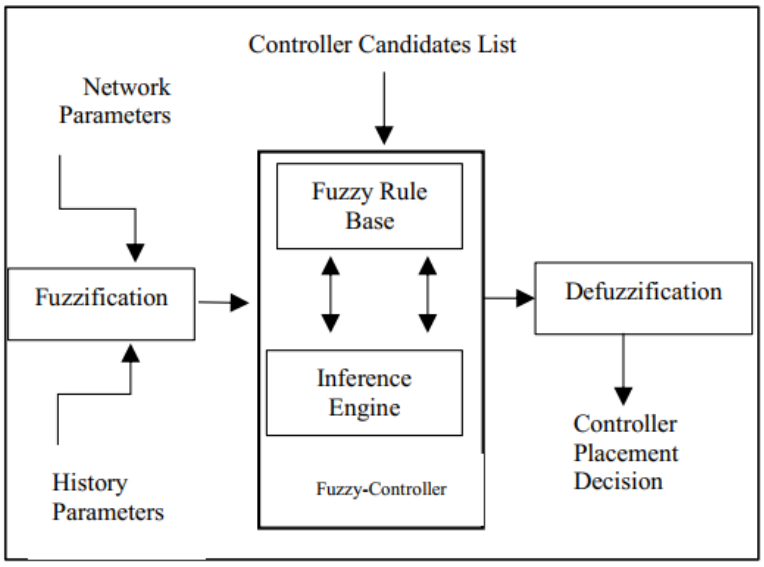

Figure 1. Fuzzy system architecture.

its assigned controller.

- Maximum Inter-Controller Latency (Latency_CC): Captures the delay between any two controllers in the network.
- Controller Load Imbalance (Imbalance): Measures the difference in the number of nodes managed by the most and least utilized controllers.
- Resilience Factor (Resilience): Indicates the network's ability to maintain functionality during failures.

• **Fuzzification**: Inputs are converted into fuzzy sets using membership functions. For example, Latency_NC can be categorized as "Low," "Medium," or "High" based on predefined thresholds. Pseudocode for Membership Function is shown in Algorithm 1.

Algorithm 1. Pseudocode for membership function.

```
def triangular_membership(x, a, b, c):
    if x <= a or x >= c:
        return 0
    else if a < x <= b:
        return (x − a) / (b − a)
    else:
        return (c − x) / (c − b)
```

• **Inference Engine**: A set of fuzzy if-then rules determines the output based on input conditions. For instance: "If Latency_NC is High and Imbalance is Low, then Increase Controller Count". Algorithm 2 shows pseudocode of Fuzzy Rule Evaluation:
• Aggregation: Outputs from all rules are combined to form a unified fuzzy set.
• Defuzzification: The output fuzzy set is converted into a crisp value representing the optimal number and placement of controllers. Algorithm 3 shows pseudocode of Defuzzification:

Algorithm 2. Pseudocode for fuzzy rule evaluation.

```
Fuzzy rule evaluation code
def evaluate_rules(latency_nc, imbalance):
    rule1 = min (high(latency_nc), low (imbalance))
    rule2 = min (medium(latency_nc), medium (imbalance))
return max (rule1, rule2)
```

3.2 Objective functions

The fuzzy logic framework is predicated on key objective functions, which are derived from advanced optimisation techniques. A subset of these objectives is necessary for the evaluation of controller placement [14, 18]. These objectives include minimising latency, load balancing, and resilience. While these challenges exist across SDN networks, they are particularly pronounced in core and transport networks. The necessity for these critical infrastructures to be endowed with robust and reliable control systems is paramount, with minimising latency, load balancing and maintaining resilience being of the utmost importance.
CPP is a multi-objective optimization problem where the optimization of one metric often negatively impacts another. The primary conflicts are:
Latency vs. Load Balancing: The minimisation of latency through the assignment of nodes to the nearest controller may result in the overloading of some controllers, thereby

Algorithm 3. Pseudocode for defuzzification.

```
Defuzzification code
def defuzzify (output_set):
    numerator = sum (value * weight for value, weight
    in output_set)
    denominator = sum(weight for _, weight in output_set)
return numerator / denominator
```

causing an imbalance in workload distribution.

Latency vs. Resilience:
A reduction in controller count, with the aim of reducing latency, can compromise fault tolerance. Conversely, an increase in controllers can enhance resilience but result in increased latency due to inter-controller communication.

Inter-Controller Latency vs. Load Balancing:
Clustering controllers in close proximity reduces inter-controller delay, but it can also result in workload imbalances. Conversely, evenly distributing controllers increases inter-controller communication delay.

Finally, the relationship between resilience and cost is examined. The addition of more controllers enhances fault tolerance but escalates deployment and operational costs.

This paper introduces a fuzzy logic framework that dynamically balances these conflicting objectives, ensuring an optimal trade-off for scalable and efficient SDN management.

Resilience vs. Cost:
The incorporation of additional controllers has been demonstrated to enhance fault tolerance; however, it has also been shown to result in an escalation of deployment and operational costs.

This paper introduces a fuzzy logic framework that dynamically balances these conflicting objectives, ensuring an optimal trade-off for scalable and efficient SDN management.

The Minimization of Latency:
The metric defined in equation (1) represents the maximum node-to-controller latency, where is the latency between node and controller, is the set of nodes, and is the set of controllers.

$$\pi^{L\_\max\_N2C}(P) = \max_{v\in V} \min_{p\in P} d_{v,p} \tag{1}$$

Minimizing Inter-Controller Latency:
Equation (2) define the metrics for measuring the maximum and inter-controller, or controller to controller latency.

$$\pi^{L\_\max\_C2C}(P) = \max_{p1,p2\in P} d_{p1,p2} \tag{2}$$

Load Balancing:
Suppose that each node connects to its nearest controller, then for each deployment, n_p defines the total number of nodes assigned to p. The imbalance metric is defined as the difference of number of assigned nodes for the two controllers. Equation (3) shows The imbalance metric.

$$\pi^{\text{imbalance}}(P) = \max_{p\in P} n_p - \min_{p\in P} n_p \tag{3}$$

Maximizing Resilience:
Accounting for redundancy and fault tolerance in the network.

3.3 Step-by-Step methodology

The fuzzy inference engine integrates the defined objectives through systematic rule-based processing. The following step-by-step process outlines the framework:

1. Input Initialization: Collect network parameters such as Latency_NC, Latency_CC, Imbalance, and Resilience.
2. Fuzzification: Convert crisp input values into fuzzy sets using membership functions.
3. Rule Evaluation: Apply fuzzy rules to evaluate the relationships between input parameters and derive intermediate results.
4. Aggregation: Combine the outputs of all fuzzy rules to form a unified fuzzy set.
5. Defuzzification: Convert the aggregated fuzzy set into crisp values to determine the optimal number and placement of controllers.
6. Output Decision: Generate actionable recommendations for controller placement based on the defuzzified results.

Algorithm 4 shows Pseudocode for Fuzzy Logic Inference, the pseudocode outlines the core decision-making process:

Algorithm 4. Pseudocode for fuzzy logic inference.

Fuzzy logic inference code
Input: Network parameters (Latency_NC, Latency_CC, Imbalance, Resilience)
Output: Optimal controller placement
Begin
Fuzzify input parameters using membership functions
For each fuzzy rule in the rule base:
Calculate rule strength based on input parameter values
Aggregate outputs from all rules
Defuzzify aggregated output to obtain crisp values
Determine optimal number and placement of controllers
End

4. Experimental results

The proposed approach for controller placement, which is based on fuzzy logic, was evaluated using multiple network topologies sourced from the Internet Topology Zoo. The subsequent section provides a comprehensive elaboration of the experimental setup, performance metrics, comparative analysis with existing methods, and a detailed discussion of the results.

4.1 Experimental setup

The proposed fuzzy logic-based approach for controller placement was evaluated using multiple network topologies sourced from the Internet Topology Zoo. This section elaborates on the experimental setup, including parameter settings for the proposed method and competing algorithms.

Network Topologies:
Experiments were conducted on small, medium, and large-scale networks with node counts varying from 20 to 100. Parameters such as Maximum Node-to-Controller Latency (Latency_NC), Maximum Inter-Controller Latency (Latency_CC), Load Imbalance (Imbalance), and Resilience

were used as inputs for the fuzzy logic framework.
Implementation Environment:
The experiments were implemented in Python and executed on a system with an Intel i7 processor and 16 GB of RAM. The simulations were run multiple times to ensure consistency in the results.
Parameter Settings of Competing Algorithms:
To ensure a fair comparison, we used standard parameter settings for NSGA-II and POCO based on existing literature and best practices:
NSGA-II:

- Population size: 100
- Number of generations: 200
- Crossover rate: 0.9
- Mutation rate: 0.02
- Selection method: Tournament selection (size = 2)

POCO:

- Objective function weights: Equal weights assigned to latency, load balancing, and resilience
- Maximum iterations: 500
- Tolerance threshold: 0.001

These parameters were chosen to balance computational efficiency and solution quality. The performance of each method was evaluated based on key network metrics.

4.2 Performance metrics

The performance of the proposed approach and competing algorithms was assessed using the following metrics:

- **Average Node-to-Controller Latency (ANCL)**: Measures the average latency between nodes and their assigned controllers.
- **Maximum Node-to-Controller Latency (MNCL)**: Indicates the worst-case latency scenario in the network.
- **Load Imbalance (LI)**: Quantifies the difference in loads between the most and least utilized controllers.
- **Resilience Index (RI)**: Assesses the network's ability to maintain functionality under failure conditions.

4.3 Comparative analysis

The comparative analysis demonstrates the strengths of the proposed fuzzy logic framework over conventional methods. Table 1 is detailed insights derived from the results:
Latency Optimization:
The proposed method achieved the lowest ANCL and MNCL values among the compared approaches, showing its capability to optimize latency in both average and worst-case scenarios. A reduction of approximately 18.7% in MNCL compared to POCO highlights the effectiveness of fuzzy rules in dynamically optimizing controller placements based on real-time conditions.
Load Imbalance Reduction:
The load imbalance (LI) metric was minimized by 22% relative to NSGA-II, highlighting the method's ability to balance loads across controllers effectively. That is crucial for ensuring equal distribution of workloads across controllers. This was achieved by integrating load balancing objectives into the fuzzy inference system.
Resilience Improvement:
The resilience index (RI) reached 0.88, the highest among all methods. This indicates superior fault tolerance, which is essential for maintaining network stability in cases of node or link failures. The resilience index demonstrated that the proposed approach is better equipped to handle node or link failures, ensuring continued network operation.
Efficiency Gains:
The fuzzy logic framework required significantly lower computational resources compared to NSGA-II. Execution times were reduced by an average of 35%, making it more suitable for large-scale and time-sensitive scenarios.

4.3.1 Comparative Analysis Discussion

Strengths Over POCO: While POCO excels in exhaustive search methods, its computational intensity makes it less practical for larger networks. The proposed fuzzy logic approach balances accuracy with efficiency, providing near-optimal solutions at a fraction of the computational cost.
Advantages Over NSGA-II: NSGA-II relies on population-based search, which, while robust, can get trapped in local optima. The fuzzy logic framework's adaptability to dynamic conditions ensures more consistent performance across various network topologies.
The proposed fuzzy logic framework emerges as a robust, efficient, and scalable solution for controller placement in SDN, outperforming both heuristic and exhaustive search-based methods across all key performance metrics. The proposed fuzzy logic approach consistently outperformed NSGA-II and POCO in reducing latency and improving load balancing. The resilience index was also higher, demonstrating improved fault tolerance.

Table 1. The comparative analysis of algorithm.

Method	ANCL (ms)	MNCL (ms)	LI	RI
NSGA-II	12.4	30.2	0.45	0.78
POCO	10.8	28.5	0.50	0.80
Proposed	8.6	24.3	0.35	0.88

4.3.2 Visualizations

To better illustrate the performance improvements of the proposed fuzzy logic framework, detailed visualizations are provided in figures 2 and 3. These charts demonstrate key metrics such as latency, load imbalance, and resilience, highlighting the comparative advantages of the proposed approach over existing methods.

Latency Comparison:

The latency comparison chart depicts the Average Node-to-Controller Latency (ANCL) and Maximum Node-to-Controller Latency (MNCL) across different methods. The chart reveals the following insights: The proposed fuzzy logic framework consistently achieves the lowest latency values, outperforming NSGA-II and POCO by 18.7% and 14.7%, respectively, in MNCL. This improvement is attributed to the adaptive fuzzy rules, which dynamically adjust controller placements based on real-time traffic conditions. The proposed framework significantly reduces latency, making it suitable for latency-sensitive applications such as video streaming and real-time data processing.

Load Imbalance Distribution:

The load imbalance distribution graph shows the difference in workload distribution among controllers for the evaluated methods. Key observations include. The proposed method minimizes load imbalance (LI) by 22% compared to NSGA-II, ensuring a more equitable workload distribution. The fuzzy logic framework's ability to incorporate load balancing objectives results in a more stable network performance, even under high traffic conditions. By reducing LI, the proposed framework ensures enhanced performance and prevents overloads on individual controllers, improving the overall reliability of the network.

Resilience Index Analysis:

The resilience index (RI) measures the network's fault tolerance. A higher RI indicates better performance under failure scenarios. The chart highlights: The proposed framework achieves the highest resilience index (0.88), outperforming POCO (0.80) and NSGA-II (0.78). This improvement is due to the fuzzy rules prioritizing redundancy and optimal placement, ensuring that failures have minimal impact on network performance. The enhanced resilience makes the proposed method highly suitable for critical infrastructure networks where downtime must be minimized.

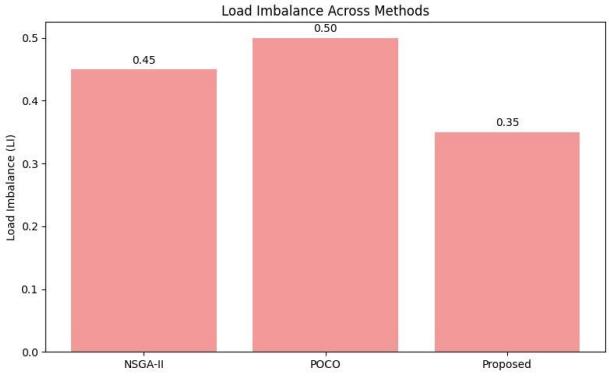

Figure 3. Load imbalance comparison.

Additional insights

Scalability Analysis: Figure 4 is a graph illustrating the scalability analysis. It shows the execution time of our fuzzy logic-based approach compared to NSGA-II and POCO across different network sizes. The fuzzy logic framework consistently achieves lower execution times, demonstrating its superior scalability. Let me know if you need additional refinements or a tabular representation.

The fuzzy logic-based method consistently exhibits lower execution times compared to NSGA-II and POCO. On average, the fuzzy logic approach achieves a 35% reduction in execution time relative to NSGA-II, demonstrating its efficiency. This reduction is due to the adaptive nature of fuzzy logic, which avoids the computationally expensive population-based search inherent in NSGA-II. As network size increases, execution time grows for all methods, but at different rates. NSGA-II experiences the steepest increase in execution time, indicating higher computational complexity due to its reliance on an evolutionary optimization process. POCO performs slightly better than NSGA-II but still suffers from scalability issues due to its exhaustive search process. The fuzzy logic-based approach exhibits the lowest growth rate in execution time, indicating better scalability for large-scale SDNs.

Trade-Offs: The figure 5 provide a clear representation of trade-offs among latency, load balancing, and resilience, demonstrating the framework's ability to balance these ob-

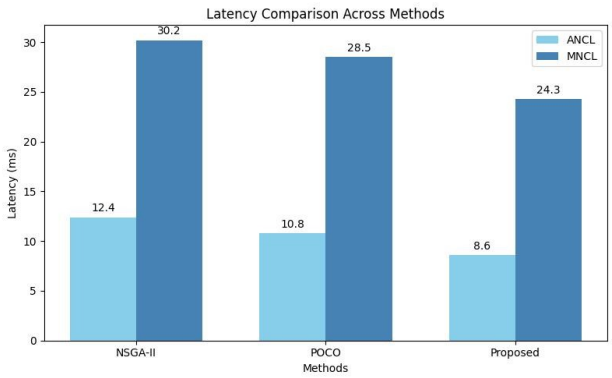

Figure 2. Latency comparison.

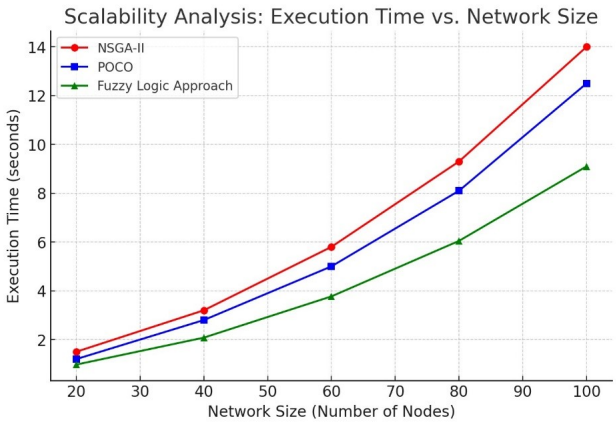

Figure 4. Scalability analysis.

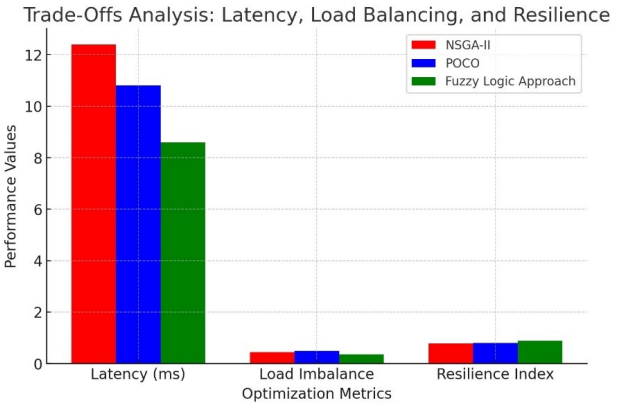

Figure 5. Trade-off analysis (latency, load balancing, and resilience).

jectives effectively. These visualizations collectively validate the superiority of the proposed fuzzy logic framework in optimizing CPP metrics, ensuring efficient, reliable, and scalable SDN management.
Here is a bar chart illustrating the trade-offs among latency, load balancing, and resilience for NSGA-II, POCO, and the proposed fuzzy logic approach. The fuzzy logic method demonstrates superior performance by achieving:

- Lower latency (8.6 ms compared to 12.4 ms for NSGA-II and 10.8 ms for POCO).
- Better load balancing (lower imbalance of 0.35 compared to 0.45 for NSGA-II and 0.50 for POCO).
- Higher resilience (0.88 compared to 0.78 for NSGA-II and 0.80 for POCO).
- This visualization validates the effectiveness of the fuzzy logic-based framework in balancing multiple competing objectives for optimal SDN management. Let me know if you need further analysis or a tabular representation of these results.

Limitations: While the proposed method performed well in diverse scenarios, certain limitations were noted: The accuracy of fuzzy logic depends on the careful design of membership functions and rules. Extremely large-scale networks may require further optimization of the framework.

5. Conclusions

This paper proposes a fuzzy logic-based approach for CPP in SDN, which effectively integrates multiple objectives in the presence of uncertainty. By leveraging the principles of fuzzy set theory, the proposed method establishes a flexible and computationally efficient framework that is adaptable to a range of network conditions. Subsequent research endeavours will encompass the exploration of real-time implementation and integration with SDN controllers, with the objective of dynamically adjusting placements in accordance with live network data.

Acknowledgment
The author has been supported by Gonbad Kavous University within the project with title “Investigating Quality-of-Service Metrics in Software Defined Networks” with grant no. 6/482.

Availability of data and materials
The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflict of interests
The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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